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ABSTRACT

The Ripon College (Wisconsin) education department is engaged in a major curriculum reform effort to include study in curriculum, pedagogy, and social foundations. In particular, an effective social foundations curriculum is being implemented to engage students in the historical, political, sociological, and philosophical ideas that impact instruction in the U.S. classroom. The social foundations core sequence in the revised curriculum consists of 4 courses totaling 11 credits: School and Society (historical foundations), Human Relations in Education (sociological foundations), Education and the State (political foundations), and Philosophical and Social Issues in Education (an integrative capstone course). The social foundations core is designed to provide a broad knowledge base, to develop skills in the critical analysis of education using the tools of social science and history, and to examine the intersections and conflicts of social foundations perspective with psychological foundations and curriculum and instruction. The core attempts to provide teachers with an academic base for understanding the social function of education and developing an informed democratic citizenry. (Contains 29 references.) (JB)

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The Importance of Social Foundations: Teacher Education Curriculum Reform in One Small Private College

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Abstract

The Ripon College education department is engaged in a major curriculum reform effort. The impetus for reform is a concern that teacher education nationwide has adopted a utilitarian orientation that over-emphasizes study of classroom practice. We believe a pedagogically effective and socially responsible teacher education curriculum requires study in both curriculum and pedagogy and social foundations. The need for reform is evidenced in the tendency for effective practice curricula to introduce multicultural education and global studies without situating either within an historical context, thus denying students understanding of how instruction in these issues often falters. To compensate, an effective social foundations curriculum will engage students in the historical, political, sociological and philosophical ideas that impact on instruction in the American classroom. This department has obtained a grant from the college to restructure its social foundations core to create such a curriculum. The conference presentation will report our progress.

Introduction and Context

Ripon College is a residential, liberal arts college located in Ripon, Wisconsin, a town proudly claiming to be the "birthplace of the Republican Party." Among the first whites settling in this location was a group of 19 men and one boy led by Warren Chase. Known as the Wisconsin Phalanx, this group was inspired by the utopian philosophy of the Frenchman Charles Fourier to create an egalitarian community far from "the world of Jargon, Contention, and Confusion." The Ceresco commune survived only four years, and in 1851, the same year that Ripon College was chartered, Warren Chase wrote of his experiment, "It was prematurely born, and tried to live before its proper time, and of course, must die and be born again, so it did and here it lies." (Ripon College Catalog, p. 3)

The demise of the Ceresco commune may have been hastened by the arrival in the area of a Captain David P. Mapes who came to Wisconsin seeking a new livelihood after his steamboat had sunk in New York's East River. He established the town of Ripon, naming it for the cathedral city Ripon, England. Mapes social vision was more commercial than the communes', and as the Ceresco community faltered he sought to attract "more responsible settlers" to the area. Believing the establishment of an institution of higher learning would help in this regard, Mapes organized the founding of the Ripon Lyceum in 1851. The first college classes were offered in 1863, and four young women were the first graduates of the college in 1867. (Miller and Ashley, 1990.

Why do we tell you this story? The theme of this conference is "Democracy and Professional Education" and the call for proposals

states that presenters should focus "on the efforts of faculty. . . to promote democracy as a legitimate concern of teacher preparation programs." The story of the founding of Ripon is a reminder that democracy is a complex, contentious, and contradictory enterprise -- one that spawned the idealistic hopes of the Ceresco settlers, the practical vision of Captain Mapes, and the courageous outrage of the abolitionist founders of the Republican Party who violated social convention and laws by keeping the underground railway open through the town of Ripon.

As teacher educators working at Ripon College, we live with historical reminders that democracy is not tidy, and that clashes and conflicts of ideas can energize citizens to define and redefine notions of how a democratic society should function. Our particular history also reminds us of how fragile communities and ideals can be. Living with this history, we have come to believe teacher education must confront prospective teachers with the notion that they are important agents in the evolution of democratic ideals and must take responsibility for the continual development of those ideals in their communities. This fundamental belief informs our approach to teacher education.

The Department of Education at Ripon College

The reform effort we will describe has taken place in a peculiar and fortunate context. Ripon College has been educating teachers since it was first chartered as a college. For nearly one hundred years, teacher education programs prepared teachers for secondary schools. In 1961, an elementary certification program was added.

The college's strong commitment to liberal arts education has meant that students completing course work for teacher certification have also been required to complete an "academic" major to qualify for graduation. This program design represented an unspoken compromise which allowed teacher education programs to continue while the liberal arts dominated the college's curriculum.

For generations of Ripon College students, this compromise meant that teacher education programs were minimalist in nature -- designed primarily to meet state certification requirements. As the state developed a program approval process and more specific standards for teacher education programs, the limits of this approach became clear. The curriculum in the department became more and more fragmented and its relationship to the ideal of a liberal education grew more unclear.

A series of personnel events created the possibility for a revitalization of the Department in 1992. Two full-time and one part-time faculty positions were open in the four person department. Improbably, three persons with strong backgrounds in the social foundations of education were hired to fill these positions and to reform the teacher education curriculum.

Our first year of work was principally concerned with the task of bringing the department into compliance with state program standards for teacher education. While it seems unlikely that such work would result in a stronger emphasis on social foundations, that is what happened. As we worked through the state standards and discussed the content and nature of the program we wanted for our students, we began to articulate a vision for teacher education that

challenges prospective teachers to think critically about the nature of the educational process and its place in a democratic society. Our study of major reform documents fed a growing concern that the national emphasis on effective practice was overshadowing the need for critical inquiry into the forces that shape and often damage educational reform efforts.[1] We were reminded of Ron Edmonds dictum:

> We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Dr. Ron Edmonds, 1986 WI Summer Academy.)

In the severe, and usually unwarranted, criticism of the public school system, Edmonds's central concern has been glossed over. Debates rage about what is wrong with the schools, but few people now have the courage to point out that the system works very well for some children, but is constrained in expanding the educational options for what Powell et. al. have described as the mass of the "unspecial", (Powell et, al, 1985) and is poorly prepared to address the needs of those children who need education the most. (Carson et.

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[1] The major reports, *A Nation at Risk, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-first Century, Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group* (but not exclusively these), as well as important scholarly analyses of teacher preparation such as Sarason's The Case for Change and Clifford's and Guthrie's Ed School, appear to us to neglect the importance of prospective teachers studying the social foundations of education and developing critical analytical tools. These documents pass over foundational perspectives to place emphasis on the psychological and individualistic aspects of learning and classroom interaction. They also attempt to address the problem of gaining professional recognition of teaching. There seems to be a generally held assumption that there is no relationship between effective teaching and social foundations knowledge. Further, some reports seem to argue that students preparing to teach are not capable of or interested in the level of intellectual engagement foundational studies require.

al., 1993) The recent adoption of a spending cap formula for Wisconsin schools that lacks any mechanism to address the significant disparities in per pupil spending between districts is but one example of a policy that promotes inequality in the name of school reform. (See Kozol's discussion of funding inequities.)

We believe teacher education must prepare students to address the consequences of inequality in their classroom through effective teaching practices, but students also need to explore the roots of social inequality and the reasons why schools have historically been required to address the resulting social problems. We want our students to engage in an extended conversation to peel back the layers of rhetoric and obfuscation under which the central issues at stake in a democracy--equality of opportunity and social justice--are being buried.

The Revised Teacher Education Curriculum at Ripon College

After considerable discussion, we decided to continue the tradition of requiring students to complete a subject area major along with their work in the education department. Such study, we believe, provides a depth of scholarly experience through which students learn to value debate and inquiry as tools for human development. Similarly, we wanted our teacher education program to emphasize the disciplined study of educational processes and institutions. We have built our curriculum to exploit the tensions among the three dominant theoretical perspectives on education represented in fields of study described as the psychological foundations of education, curriculum & instruction, and the social

foundations of education. We believe each of these perspectives has much to offer prospective teachers, but we are determined that our program give special attention to the social and political dimensions of teaching so our graduates will have the analytical skills and knowledge base they need to be advocates for democracy in their work as teachers. The philosophy statement in our student handbook makes this orientation particularly clear:

> We believe the combination of liberal and professional education in Ripon College's teacher education programs is particularly effective for preparing teachers who can and want to address the complex tasks and goals of teaching in a democratic society. . . . the curriculum . . is designed to prepare teachers who share these basic beliefs: (1) All individuals have abilities, rights, and responsibilities to learn an array of subjects preparing them to relate to the diverse people and institutions that comprise a democratic society. (2) The democratic social context requires a learning process in which teachers and students constantly explore how they relate to each other, their school, community, nation and world. Graduates of this curriculum should be firmly committed to the idea that teachers have a special responsibility to insure that all individuals realize the benefits and obligations of being free citizens in a democratic state. (Handbook, p. 2.)

The Social Foundations Core

The social foundations core in the revised curriculum is comprised of four courses totaling eleven credits. In sequence, these courses are School and Society (historical foundations), Human Relations in Education (sociological foundations), Education and the State (political foundations), and Philosophical and Social Issues in Education (an integrative capstone course). The social foundations core is designed to provide a broad knowledge base, develop skills in the analysis of education using the tools of social science and history,

and examine the intersections and conflicts of the social foundations perspective with psychological foundations and curriculum and instruction.

The foundations core is dedicated to providing prospective teachers with an academic base for understanding the social function of education; however, it is also committed to public education and its historical purpose of developing an informed democratic citizenry. (See the discussions of this relationship in Spring 1994 and Kaestle 1993.) The two broad objectives of the foundations core are to explore what democratic citizenship means, and to examine the relationship between education and the continued development of a democratic society. These objectives are rooted in three observations of educational discourse and practice in the United States. First, we note that democracy and democratic citizenship have rarely been clearly defined for purposes of elementary and secondary education.[2] Second, the education of prospective teachers has only infrequently included substantive discussion of the issue of how children can be taught to be active and effective citizens. Third, the first two phenomena derive from a general tendency to define education as a very individualistic, psychologically-based process, albeit one with broad social implications. Our foundations core begins with the understandings that education is first and foremost a social practice and that the meaning and goals of that practice change over time, particularly in a democracy.

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[2]Dewey's Democracy and Education remains one of the best sustained discussions of this idea, but few teacher education programs draw from this text or engage students in extended discussion of what it means to teach in a democratic society.

The foundations core explores how democracy, democratic citizenship, and democratic practice can be defined. The courses also engage students in discussion of how education and democracy relate to one another. Historically, democracy has been presented as an institution in which citizens participate chiefly through their role as voters. Critical analyses of this "civic responsibility" approach have shown that it avoids consideration of the controversial issues inherent in democratic society (See Spring 1994, and Stanley and Nelson, 1994.) and neglects the fundamental contradiction in modern democratic society: the belief and assertion of individual political equality in an unequal social and economic system that supports political inequality. As they move through the sequence of foundations courses, students should revisit these basic concerns a number of times, each time from a somewhat different platform of knowledge and analysis.

The Social Foundations Core Courses

The first course in the social foundations sequence is School and Society. The content of this course addresses the history of American education, preceded by brief discussions of the nature and types of education, the social purposes of education, and the phenomenon of mass schooling.

Students usually take Social Foundations during the second semester of their freshman, or first semester of their sophomore years. The placement of study of the history of American education early in the education program assumes that students who have some motivation to become teachers (the course has had a small

number of non-certification students attending) can and should learn about the historical foundations from which American schools developed.

School and Society draws its content from a number of sources. Its texts are Tozer's School and Society (1993) and Kaestle's Pillars of the Republic.(1983). Students develop oral presentations about educators beginning with Rousseau as well as complete group projects on more contemporary social issues in education. The course, however, concentrates on the changing functions of education as the United States developed from a merchant and peasant farmer society with limited democratic participation to one in which a much larger number, percentage, and variety of citizens experience significantly expanded liberties.

The course concentrates on the progressive and restrictive character of various contradictions in American society that impact on the practice of education. As examples:

> Schools are required to build a common national society; however, the United States has always been a multicultural society with severe social conflicts.
>
> Education is required to resolve the personal and social crises resulting from the growth in the belief that political and social equality are "good" but economic equality is not.
>
> Teachers are required to achieve high education and to be well trained; however, they are not respected as political actors and are poorly remunerated.

These are but a few of the contradictions in American society that are emphasized because of their impact on teachers' work. Other issues that have a long historical basis are multicultural

characteristics of American society; religious foundations of American democracy; and school as a social tool to solve major social problems related to poverty, crime and changes in the family. Each issue is presented as it occurs in an historical period and reoccurs later to show how it has affected educational practice and how it could impact on a teacher in the classroom. Through these discussions, students learn about the history of educational issues and confront the conflicting and contradictory nature of educational practices and ideologies.

The latter is critical since an objective is to lead students to an understanding that they will be forced to take positions on many issues as teachers and as citizens in their communities. If they resist dealing with these problems, they must answer how they will model being good citizens, since one of the dominant and continuing goals of schooling is to prepare children to be good citizens.

Education and the State is taken as either the second or third course in the foundations sequence. This course was initiated to provide a basic knowledge of national, state, and local government as required by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The course objectives, however, have been expanded to address the issues of political development from an ideal rather than institutional perspective. Using major documents from the *Magna Carta* to the *Constitution*, students explore how social groups were created, contended with each other, and ultimately arrived at a democratic political system which balances group rights with unequal social relations. Students, then, are asked to think about the relationship of the concepts of rights, freedoms, and equality to power. They

confront the difference between freedom and liberty and the tensions between equality and unequal power inherent in a stratified society.

Students read Spring's Conflict of Interests (1993) as well as documents such as *Brown vs. the Board of Education* and *Plessy vs. Ferguson* to analyze the political nature of education and how the ideals and institutions of democracy have impacted on the practice of education.

Because there is a direct correspondence between the historical development of democracy and mass education, and because the ideals and institutions are integrated, the course requires students to explore what they believe should occur in schools. That is, should schools be political? What are the issues that make schools arenas of conflict? How does the nature of American democracy affect the operation of schools? How do the ideals of liberty, rights, and equality relate to educational practice and the social realities of unequal social relationships? Because democracy is in constant reconstruction, there is no expectation that these questions will have simple answers.

The Human Relations course in the social foundations sequence is grounded in a sociological approach to the study of education. The course builds on the historical emphasis of School and Society with an emphasis on social change since the Moynihan report and its effects on education. Sara Lawrence Lightfoot writes in The Good High School:

> We have little understanding of how to interpret a behavior, an attitude, a value unless we see it embedded in a context and

> have some ideas of the history and evolution of the ideals and norms of that setting (p. 23).

This ideal is essential to the pedagogy of Human Relations. Because the department believes students cannot fully understand the impact of discrimination on educational institutions and practices without clarifying how values and ideals are shaped by social forces, the various "isms" (including classism, racism, and sexism) are addressed first from a historical perspective, then from a sociological perspective and finally within the context of educational settings.

The Human Relations course is organized deductively--examining discrimination in the society at large, narrowing to schools and then looking at the effects of discrimination on individual students and their teachers. The social and individual dimensions of discrimination are contrasted as students read The Ethnic Myth by Stephen Steinberg (1989) and Makes Me Wanna Holler by Nathan McCall (1994). Readings by Steele, Heath, Kozol, Fordham and Ogbu, Banks, Lightfoot, Satz, and a selection from the AAUW Report on the schooling of girls present varying perspectives on the ways social class, ethnic identification, sexual orientation, and gender make a difference in the social lives of children and their school experiences. Discussion of these readings are organized to lead students to make critical linkages between past inequities and their perpetuation in present American society and think deeply about the impact these social constructs could have on classroom teachers behind their closed school doors. The principal goal of the course, finally, is to move students toward a deeper understanding of the ways schools

reflect and might bring about change in the social conditions that put some citizens at a disadvantage in this democratic society.

The department of education is currently revising its capstone course **Philosophical and Social Issues.** The generally accepted objectives to be implemented include having students form research groups to develop in-depth knowledge about contemporary issues in education; analyzing philosophies of education to arrive at their own; applying their philosophies in the research process; and meeting with former students to explore and discuss selected educational issues and concerns. One aspect of the current course will remain, that is the study of the legal rights and responsibilities of teachers. This topic always ignites questions of power, status, and participation and, of course, is practical knowledge for future teachers.

Conclusion

Schools are social institutions. They are established by society. Since before the common school reforms, schools have been expected to educate individuals for social purposes. It is true that the psychological goals of individual improvement highlighted during the enlightenment, and the spiritual objective of individual salvation rooted in the Reformation, have been significant objectives of schools. However, the broad social goals of preparing for social change, improving society, solving social problems, creating a nation-state, and facilitating economic development continue to be the primary goals of education in our democratic society.

If these are, in fact, major objectives, how many teacher education programs prepare future educators to be actors in a

democratic society, and active political participants in their community and school systems, to address how children are to be educated for those broad social goals? Only by learning about the historical, political, sociological, and philosophical roots of the functions of schools in a democratic society can teachers arrive at a more complete understanding of the enterprise they hope to make a career. If teachers are prepared only in learning theory, methodology and curriculum, then they are ill-prepared to confront the very forces that most impact on their effective practices.

Teachers have many roles: educators, baby-sitters, counselors, socializers, on-site parents and bureaucrats. When schools do not meet the broad social objectives set for them, as they can not, teachers also take the role of scapegoats. Only when teachers understand that this occurs because of the contradictions and conflicts in society can they also conclude that, as informed citizens themselves, they can exercise their democratic powers to accomplish all of the objectives they and society set for their occupation. In this practice, teachers can become effective democratic role models and so begin to address a major goal for American schools: to teach children to be "good" democratic citizens.

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